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ABSTRACT

This document examines policy issues related to preparing educators to work with diverse learners, including students with disabilities. It begins by discussing the growing emphasis on accountability for all students and general education and special education as a unified system. Strategies that states are using for teacher recruitment and preparation are explored, as well as approaches used by schools of education. Key areas for teacher education reform are then identified and include: (1) the need to ensure student teachers have appropriate clinical experiences with a range of students; (2) the need to ensure that all teacher candidates, including those from traditionally underrepresented groups, have the skills needed to pass teacher licensure tests, and for a broad consensus among various education specializations to support a balanced and complete curriculum for teacher education; (3) the need to ensure that performance assessments measure the extent to which teacher candidates demonstrate their ability to work with diverse students; (4) the need to consider diversity and preparation in using a variety of instructional strategies when planning and implementing performance pay incentives; and (5) new policy approaches to alternative licensing to ensure that teachers are prepared to serve children with disabilities in the regular classroom. (CR)

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Quick Turn Around

Project Forum

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Teacher Quality: Selected Issues of Importance

November 2001

by Patrice Linehan

Purpose

This *Quick Turn Around* (QTA) examines policy issues related to preparing educators to work with diverse learners, including students with disabilities. Currently, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is undertaking a number of activities in this area, primarily through the Policymaker Partnership (PMP).[1]

As part of its Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Project FORUM worked with PMP to highlight personnel development issues that have emerged as part of discussions between NASDSE and other groups – including those focused on general education, educational leadership, higher education, and policymaking. Many of these groups have been approaching critical personnel matters independent of one another.

The purpose of this document is to raise questions to consider on this topic, so that a more comprehensive approach can be taken by the broader education policymaker community.

Background

Accountability for All Students

The core component of the education reform movement of the 1990's is accountability. Education in the United States has been criticized for allowing students to leave school without the skills necessary to compete in a global economy, and increasing pressure is being applied at every level of the system to improve student achievement (Ahearn, 1997). As a result, more attention is being paid to evaluating the performance of *all* students, including diverse learners such as students with disabilities and those living in poverty.

Two federal legislative changes set the context for applying high standards and expectations for high achievement to *all* students. First, in 1994, the Improving America's School Act (IASA) called for changes in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to ensure that schools with high concentrations of students in poverty held students to the same high standards as more resource-rich schools. Second, reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 required that students with disabilities be included in state and local assessments with appropriate accommodations as necessary, and that their test results be reported in the same manner and frequency as other students' test results. Thus, local schools have shifted to a more focused attention on educational outcomes rather than procedural compliance.

In many ways, education reform and accountability for all students have led to inclusive practice and more collaborative planning between general and special education (McLaughlin, Erickson, Hardman, McDonnell, Welch, Massell and Parrish, 1998). Many students with disabilities are included in general

[1] PMP is one of four OSEP-funded projects working together to contribute to the successful implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to improve educational results for children with disabilities.

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education classrooms and general education teachers are finding that they need new skills to deliver instruction to this diverse student population. Clarification of teacher roles and responsibilities is critical as co-teaching and other collaboration between general and special educators increases. And, increasing responsibilities for both general and special education teachers also demand more skills in supervision and collaboration. Therefore, there is a rising sense of urgency to provide quality opportunities for professional development.

At the same time, special educators are realizing that they are accountable for maintaining high standards and expectations, and must teach the general education curriculum that will be tested as part of the overall system. This alignment between the curriculum and assessment is very important, especially in secondary education where high stakes assessments and graduation requirements impact students the most. Since it is important for general educators to build their didactic skills, and special educators to deepen their content knowledge, the importance of effective preservice and inservice preparation is heightened for both groups.

General Education and Special Education as a Unified System

Preparation of all educators, including general educators, on the range of diversity found in the classroom is important, especially within the context of accountability for all students. It is a shared responsibility and everyone must have the ability to teach a range of students (McLaughlin, Erickson, Hardman, McDonnell, Welch, Massell and Parrish, 1998). At a meeting convened by the National Governors' Association in May 2001, a wide range of educational stakeholders (e.g., representatives from teachers union, higher education, legislative staffs and testing companies) discussed the need to broaden stakeholder involvement and create a unified PreK-12 system. The following section highlights some major points raised during the discussion.

Every teacher needs to have a certain level of skill in certain areas of content (e.g., reading), classroom management (e.g., positive behavioral intervention and support), and program planning (e.g., transition planning). All teachers must learn how to structure a class so that students benefit. An overall commitment to personnel development is critical so that all teachers feel competent to guide, teach and manage the behavior of all students.

Special educators can assist general educators by highlighting disability-specific issues in the context of the larger education and related services system. In order to do this, it will be necessary for the two groups to come together to discuss common issues. Forums such as the Improving America's Schools (IAS) conferences, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, may provide the opportunity for this type of dialogue to occur. As part of the IAS series, state teams have gathered to discuss broad issues of teacher quality through Regional Teacher Quality Institutes. At the institutes, state teams have participated in working meetings to redesign their teacher preparation programs by improving coordination between schools of arts and sciences and teacher preparation, as well as with neighboring community colleges and PreK-12 systems. The special education community should be aware of, and involved in such activities, which are predominantly attended by general educators.

Content Knowledge and Pedagogy

All teachers have a responsibility to all students and must seek additional information necessary to serve them appropriately. In order to teach the increasingly diverse student population – whether within the general or special education classroom – it is generally considered favorable to obtain endorsements or to have dual certification in special education and a specific content area.

If a special educator is certified in a content area, such as science, s/he may be hired to teach in a general education classroom, benefiting all students in the class through a range of instructional skills. However, a qualified secondary education teacher of this type may be more likely to take a general education

assignment for which s/he can basically teach the same class throughout the day. If that same teacher, certified to teach science, were in a separate special education classroom, s/he would still have to cover other content areas – such as English and Social Sciences – and may not feel as competent teaching in those areas. Therefore, issues of teacher quality may overlap with other existing challenges, such as teacher shortages.

If teachers are expected to add-on endorsements - whether it be in a content area or curricular specialization such as teaching students with learning disabilities – university professional development will have to respond to the change. Therefore, it is important to consider the role of institutions of higher education in the growing discussion of whether teachers should be required to have additional endorsements to teach the diversity of students in today's classrooms. Two scenarios to consider are:

- Universities may make special education a specialization, requiring advanced coursework to cover the range of topics that need to be addressed.
- Special education could become a minor field of study within education, resulting in the elimination of important coursework, especially related to low-incidence disabilities (e.g., visual or hearing impairments).

These examples stress the importance of including all stakeholders in the complex and interrelated discussions of teacher quality issues.

State Role

Legislation

Policymakers realize that the success of current standards-based reforms and accountability depend on qualified personnel, particularly teachers. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), a PMP Primary Partner, state legislatures are responding by increasing their role in education (Samuelsen, 2000). During the 1998-99 session, 36 states passed legislation around teacher quality issues in the following areas:

- Teacher Preparation
  (18 enactments in 11 states)
- Teacher Recruitment
  (16 enactments in 11 states)
- Teacher Retention through Salary/Benefits
  (20 enactments in 11 states)
- Certification
  (39 enactments in 21 states)
- Professional Development
  (27 enactments in 18 states)

(Samuelsen, 2000)

Teacher Preparation

Increasingly, state legislatures have imposed more regulations on teacher preparation. Shortages created by an aging teacher population, coupled with increased student enrollment, have especially focused state attention on teacher preparation. Moreover, with education as the number one issue for voters in the last election cycle, according to a National Education Association survey, and recent research demonstrating the impact of teacher quality on student achievement (www.nea.org/neatoday/0101/news12), many organizations are moving teacher quality issues to the forefront of education considerations.

Increasingly, state legislatures are joining other state government units, such as the state education agency (SEA) or State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), in specifying how teacher preparations funds can be used (e.g., technology skill-building for teachers required for certification or recertification). Through legislation, they are mandating that preparation programs include performance-based evaluations of prospective teachers, and specific curricula and course offerings.

One strategy for maximizing the use of professional development dollars is pooling resources between state and university grant recipients. In the past, PMP has sponsored meetings to further such partnerships by bringing State Improvement Grant (SIG) and state Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement

Grant awardees together to discuss shared planning and activities.

Teacher Recruitment

In many states and for certain subjects, the supply of certified teachers is not meeting the demand of local school districts and this shortage is expected to worsen. It is estimated that 2.2 million teachers will be needed in the next ten years. Increased enrollment is expected to compound an already difficult situation, and the supply of teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups is not keeping pace with demographic changes in student enrollment. While recruitment of special education teachers is a critical need, other areas are facing similar demand. Urban and rural districts, particularly those with high poverty populations, are experiencing severe shortages. Shortages also exist in certain subject areas (e.g., bilingual education, science, and math).

States are attempting to alleviate teacher shortages in a number of ways. At least 27 states have loan forgiveness or scholarship programs for college students who agree to teach in subject areas with severe personnel shortages and to work in public schools, especially those in high-poverty locations. Specific state incentive programs offer additional inducements (e.g., grants, scholarships, and housing subsidies) for candidates from under-represented groups. Ten states target efforts to minority candidates, 19 to specific shortage fields, and 10 to schools with particular demographics or low academic performance. For example, one state assumes education loans for applicants agreeing to work in school districts with high numbers of emergency certification permit holders.

While many universities, departments of education, boards of regents and county boards already take part in state recruitment efforts, some specific university activities have been mandated through legislation. State-supported universities in one state must provide detailed reporting of potential candidates. Universities in another state were required to develop a teacher recruitment program to encourage licensed teachers to teach in high-shortage locations within the state and to seek endorsements in specialized fields. Other states' recruitment programs include signing bonuses for candidates who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class or who agree to teach in a shortage area, and teaching scholarships to high school seniors participating in university programs to prepare teachers.

Teacher Retention

The lack of prestige for the teaching profession, combined with relatively low compensation, is often viewed as a major deterrent in attracting and keeping qualified people in the field. State efforts to retain competent teachers are focused mainly on supplementing the salaries of teachers who seek continued education and certification or endorsements in high-demand areas. Although salary issues have been managed largely at the local level in the past, states are increasingly allocating raises and creating other incentives to retain teachers. Still, it is important to note that the percentage of dollars allocated for such purposes varies greatly from state to state and even within states.

National Board Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards – generally considered a rigorous process requiring teachers to demonstrate exemplary knowledge and skills in pedagogy – is rewarded in many states. At least 23 states provide incentives to teachers who successfully complete National Board Certification. Bonuses or professional development funds for acquiring "master teacher" status in specific areas (e.g., teaching reading) are awarded in some states. In other states, schools receive monetary compensation for performing well as part of the state accountability system. Teachers are eligible for a portion of the monetary compensations in eight states.

Alternative Routes to Certification

In addition to providing incentives to teachers newly entering the field and those willing to teach in "hard to fill areas" for an extended period of time, states are implementing

alternative routes to certification or licensure. Alternative paths generally are designed to make it easier for mid-career professional and paraprofessionals to enter the teaching field, and help districts meet the growing demand for classroom teachers. These programs vary greatly, creating different ways and structures for individuals to meet state certification requirements. Since the early 1980's, at least 40 states have authorized alternative routes to certification.

Professional Development

In 1998, 47 states had a policy on professional development as a requirement for license renewal; 32 of these states require professional development and some have increased funding for such activities. States also are developing statewide program strategies, such as mandating that schools dedicate a certain number of hours per week for lesson preparation and teacher conferences (Samuelsen, 2000). Additionally, states are establishing teacher led academies, summer institutes and regional professional development centers.

While states determine the requirements and issue teacher licenses, they do not always require university courses for licensure attainment or renewal. Professional development of teachers varies considerably from state to state and courses are delivered by district, state, college, university and private vendor representatives. Because state and school district policies may focus on the number of professional development credits rather then the course content or resulting teacher performance, activities may be chosen for convenience instead of professional need. Variation in the quality of the professional development may lead to inconsistency in teacher performance.

In response to a perceived disconnect between universities, state agencies and professionals in the field, efforts are underway to develop consistent standards for the evaluation of teacher performance. For example, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a PMP Primary Partner, has been working with a consortium of state education agencies, higher education institutions, and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform of the education, licensing, and on-going professional development of teachers. The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) was created to promote standards-based reform through the development of model standards and assessments for beginning teachers.

In June 2001, INTASC and a number of national educational organizations[2] collaborated with The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, which led a national symposium on *Policy and Practice to Ensure High Quality Teachers for Children and Youth with Disabilities*. State teams attending the symposium focused on how state policies and practices can impact the development of a highly qualified special education workforce through alignment of professional teaching standards, initial teacher licensure, and teacher preparation program approval and accreditation. These teams developed action plans to take back to their states for further consideration and implementation.

In the coming year, PMP plans to involve all states in the discussion of INTASC standards through the Federal and Regional Resource Center network. The network also participated in providing technical assistance to symposium state teams, and it is hoped that the work of these teams will continue to involve the broader education community and serve as models for states that were unable to attend the symposium.

Additionally, schools of education are taking a more systematic approach to building partnerships and school-based programs that enhance professional development, preservice education and research. Some of these efforts revolve around *professional development schools (PDS)* that partner teacher preparation program faculty with school personnel to improve their respective teaching and research

[2] NASDSE, The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

domains. These teams allow preservice teacher candidates to gain practical knowledge relevant to student learning within the school setting and the exchange leads to simultaneous renewal of the teacher education process.

The on-going support provided through structured induction, such as one might receive from a PDS experience, is thought to reduce new teacher burnout and relatively quick exit from the education system. Generally, it is believed that if new teachers feel successful within the first two years, they are less likely to leave the field. Promising models of professional development for practicing teachers, especially related to the induction of new teachers, are emerging through partnerships. For example, universities with teacher preparation programs are forming education Reform Networks that support partnerships between universities and public schools as a way to promote simultaneous renewal in PreK-12 schools and teacher education. Some of the issues raised by the Reform Network groups were formulated into a policy statement and are summarized in the next section.

Policies Effecting Teacher Preparation

Many educational organizations have been focusing on critical issues specifically related to higher education, reform and accountability. For example, the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) has partnered with the Higher Education Consortium of Special Education (HECSE) and PMP to discuss the issues around teacher education, meeting the needs of a diverse student population and implementing IDEA.

Discussions among these three groups (AACTE, HECSE and PMP) led to a more focused invitational meeting of Higher Education Reform Networks[3] to discuss *Special Education, Personnel Needs and Teacher Education Reform.* At the meeting, which took place December 7-9, 2000, participants identified a number of policy tensions to be considered by those concerned with preparation of teachers who will succeed with all children and are committed to equitable access to learning for all.

According to the Reform Networks, the dual issues of teacher supply and high quality preparation influence the development of teacher education programs. Because teacher education is increasingly a matter of public policy, these issues frame important policy challenges that join the interests of those working to reform teacher education with those concerned with implementation of IDEA '97.

There are two broad views of improving teaching and teacher education that are garnering attention in the policy arena. The first emphasizes the professional aspect of teaching aimed at raising standards through a number of promising teacher preparation methods and approaches to personnel preparation. The second emphasizes accountability for results based on teacher test pass rates (e.g., Praxis, Praxis II tests). One perspective focuses on methods and approaches while the other stresses content knowledge as measured by test results.

The tension between these two perspectives is believed to generate a number of important policy levers – areas in which the actions of state and federal governments can either facilitate or hinder the development of teacher education programs that prepare teachers to serve all students. The Reform Networks identified six areas of particular importance to teacher education reform as well as to those working to implement IDEA '97. These six

[3] This joint meeting of Reform Networks included the Holmes Partnership (along with representation from the Urban Network of Institutes of Teacher Education), National Network for Education Renewal (NNER), and the Renaissance Group, which all include AACTE affiliated institutions. All are committed to working with like-minded educators and policy makers to improve the nation's collegiate-based system of teacher education.

areas, and the policy levers associated with each, were endorsed by the AACTE Board of Directors and are paraphrased below.

Nature of the Clinical Experience

Acknowledgement of the importance of the clinical experience component of preservice preparation of teachers often results in mandated requirements for the length of time and nature of the experience. The quality, content, and setting of the clinical experience is of concern to both teacher education reformers and the special education community. Their collective goals would be supported by policies that ensure all prospective teachers have: (a) appropriate clinical experiences with a range of students, (b) the support needed to succeed with these children, and (c) experience that supports the efforts of the school and university faculty in improving services for children with disabilities.

Teacher Education Curriculum and Teacher Tests

The teacher education curriculum is often shaped by state legislatures, state departments of education and accrediting agencies. While policymakers may act to limit the length of teacher education programs, interest groups call for additional attention on specialized issues (e.g., reading instruction, multiculturalism, teaching diverse learners). Implementation of Title II of the 1998 Higher Education Amendments[4] requires the public reporting of pass rates on teacher licensure tests. This requirement will increase the power of the state to shape the teacher education curriculum due to the heightened attention.

Because of the visibility of pass rates through this system of public reporting, teacher preparation programs will be judged according to how well their graduates perform on the tests in comparison to other university graduates. The program decision-makers will feel pressure to align specific areas of the curriculum with the test content. Therefore, some teacher preparation program areas will be emphasized over others in an attempt to improve test pass rates. If there is increased emphasis toward more teacher testing, it will be necessary to ensure that all teacher candidates, including those from traditionally underrepresented groups, have the skills needed to pass these tests. Considering these competing interests, broad consensus is needed among various education specializations to support a balanced and complete curriculum for teacher education.

Performance Assessments

More states are requiring teacher candidates to undergo performance assessments prior to licensing and are prescribing teacher work samples or other means of evaluating candidates' classroom performance and impact of student learning. Performance assessments also must measure the extent to which teacher candidates demonstrate their ability to work with diverse students.

Performance Pay

Performance pay - which bases salary increases, bonuses and other incentives on improved student outcomes - can either encourage or discourage teachers from meeting the challenges associated with disability and diversity in the classroom. Promising models exist on how well qualified teachers can be recruited into challenging classroom situations, including those related to performance pay. The Reform Networks and other education organizations have discussed the need to consider diversity and preparation in using a variety of instructional strategies when planning and implementing performance pay incentives.

Alternative Licensing

As states turn to alternative licensing to meet teacher shortages, more and more students will be taught by individuals who have little or no experience with the diversity of students in

[4] Title II of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, authorized three programs – State Grants, Partnership Grants and Teacher Recruitment Grants – intended to make lasting changes in the ways teachers are recruited, prepared, licensed and supported. A clear focus of these grants is supported efforts to reduce shortages of qualified teachers in high-need school districts.

today's classrooms. According to the Reform Networks, new policy approaches to alternative licensing are needed to ensure that teachers are prepared to serve children with disabilities in the regular classroom.

Policymaker Partnership Activities

PMP staff will assist AACTE in its efforts to widely disseminate the six areas highlighted in the policy statement outlined above. The central message of preparing teachers to work with all students is one example of the many agendas that PMP shares with its partners and intends to promote as part of its partnership with other organizations.

As part of PMP's dialogue with other policymaking organizations,[5] partners are working to build capacity beyond the traditional funding sources through collaborative activities within and among organizations to address issues of teacher quality.[6] Considering the activities outlined in this document, it is important for state leaders to approach the topic of teacher quality in a comprehensive manner by considering special education activities within the broader context of personnel development.

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[5] PMP has 11 primary partners that represent key policymaking constituencies (e.g., Chief State School Officers, School Administrators, State Legislators), nine supporting partners representing professional associations, and 22 linking partners that are federally funded technical assistance and dissemination centers.

[6] A number of resources on these topics are available through PMP's mini-web on Teacher Quality: www.ideapolicy.org/teacher%20quality/teacher-index_frame.htm

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